

THE DM TOOL CHEST

SCALES OF RETRIBUTION

AN ATTACK ON A MINE LEADS TO A CRUMBLING SWAMP FORTRESS HIDING DARK SECRETS



SCALES OF RETRIBUTION



*S*cales of Retribution is a Fifth Edition adventure for **three to five characters of 3rd to 4th level**, optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 3**.

When the mines of Blackstone Crossing are sabotaged by vengeful kobolds, a band of adventurers must navigate the treacherous Hillsmere Bowels and breach the walls of Witherbog Keep to unravel a web of corruption and injustice. Along the way, they must decide between bloody retribution or uneasy redemption.

This adventure takes place in the Freelands campaign setting and can be adapted to any campaign that has a ruined keep in a swamp with a few name changes.

ADVENTURE RULES

The 5th Edition core rulebooks are recommended to run this adventure. A free copy of the 5th Edition System Reference Document (SRD) and basic rule set can be found online and can be used in place of the core books.

A boxed description like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players. These suggested prompts may be used or disregarded at the GM's discretion.

In this adventure are references pointing to information presented outside the module. Magic items, spells, and equipment are *italicized*, and their descriptions are located in either the core rulebooks or the 5th Edition SRD. NPC and creature names are **bolded** to indicate the stat block referenced for combat purposes. These statistics are located in the core 5th Edition monster guidebook, the 5th Edition SRD, or presented in an attached appendix.

BACKGROUND

On the outskirts of the bustling town of Blackstone Crossing, nestled between craggy hills, lies Darkshard Mine. It is an economic pillar for the community, yielding precious gems and rare metals along with the eponymous dark granite used heavily in the town's construction. However, unknown to most townspeople, the labor force consisted partly of captured kobolds. The Doralli Mining Company, under the guise of convoluted worker contracts, forced the kobolds to dig tirelessly to speed up production. The company hid the kobolds in tunnels away from the other miners, keeping them blissfully unaware of their presence.

Krazzix Sharpclaw, a cunning and fearless kobold warlord, discovered the suffering of his kin at the hands of the corrupt mining company. Incensed and driven by a

profound sense of duty, he gathered a squad of battle-hardened kobolds and waged a surprise attack on the mine. The miners stood no chance; many were slain in the chaos, while a handful—including the Doralli foreman, Eamon Cragjaw—were taken captive.

Krazzix and his followers retreated to Witherbog Keep, a decaying stronghold hidden amidst the labyrinthine swamp known as the Hillsmere Bowels in the Proudmore Woodlands south of Blackstone Crossing. The keep was home to the ogre brothers Magrath and Jimbo, and—after some convincing and offers of human flesh—the pair allowed Krazzix and his ragtag band to take up residence. The wily warlord knew that retribution would soon be knocking at their door and sent most of the refugees on their way as he began preparing defenses around the crumbling keep. Meanwhile, Krazzix holds Eamon captive in the keep's temple, giving each kobold a chance to take their vengeance on him—in blood.

KOBOLD MINER



ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The characters embark on a journey through the Hillsmere Bowels and face its challenges as they make their way to Witherbog Keep. The crumbling fortress has been fortified by the escaped kobolds with traps and protected by sentries. After sneaking or fighting their way into the keep, the party can attempt to rescue the kidnapped miners from the stew pot of the local ogres. Along the way, they learn more about the attack on the mine and discover there is more to the story than what they were initially told. Once they reach the heart of the keep, the characters find the mine's foreman battered and bleeding, barely clinging to life. They face off against Krazzix and learn the truth about the kobolds' forced labor in the mine. They must decide whether to fight for the life of the corrupt foreman or leave him to his fate at the hands of the kobolds.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are a few ways to get your characters hooked into this adventure:

THE INJURED MINER

While traveling near Blackstone Crossing, the party encounters a wounded human miner, gasping for air and struggling to stay conscious. He reveals that his name is Jed and that he narrowly escaped an attack on Darkshard Mine by a group of kobolds. Jed implores the adventurers to venture into Witherbog Keep to rescue the captive miners, including his brother Bartleby, who remain in peril.

KOBOLD RAIDS

As the party relaxes in the Creaking Tankard, a local tavern in Blackstone Crossing, they overhear rumors about increasing kobold raids. An old prospector named Hobb shares the most recent story: a gem mine near the town was attacked and the kobolds have taken refuge in Witherbog Keep. Hobb suggests that whoever is brave enough to deal with the menace might find untold riches in the kobolds' lair.

MERCENARIES FOR HIRE

A well-dressed individual approaches the party, introducing themselves as Quintus, a representative of the Doralli Mining Company. Quintus offers a contract: rescue the miners and recover stolen gems from Witherbog Keep. The reward is 500 gp, with a hefty bonus for any captives saved. However, Quintus emphasizes the need for discretion and to recover the stolen gems as quickly as possible—and to save the kidnapped miners, of course.

BLACKSTONE CROSSING

- **Population:** 7,500 (mostly human)
- **Town Guard:** 250 guards, 20 veterans
- **Mining:** Significant source of black granite, iron, and precious stones.
- **Fishing:** Swift River teeming with various types of fish.
- **Trading:** Major overland hub connecting Hopewell Harbor and the Holy Ignis Empire.
- **Notable Landmarks:** Blackstone Bridge, Sentinel North and Guardian South Gates, Waylight Bazaar

Blackstone Crossing is a bustling trade hub nestled in the foothills of the Motionless Mountains that sprawls alongside the rapid currents of the Swift River. Founded by the Blackstone clan, the former warriors discovered arcane stonemasonry secrets unearthed from Dwarven tablets in the lost tunnels of Mount Durinheim. Harnessing that ancient knowledge, they constructed the awe-inspiring Blackstone Bridge, a 200-meter engineering marvel of dark, polished granite that spans the wild expanse of the Swift River. This monumental structure, together with strategically placed causeways, transformed the town from a modest hamlet into the thriving commercial hub it is today, its veins pulsating with goods ferried between Hopewell Harbor and the deserts of the Holy Ignis Empire.

Constantly awash in motion and noise, Blackstone Crossing never sleeps. The Waylight Bazaar, located in Market Square, explodes with a sensory overload of fragrant spices, vivid textiles, and the cacophonous bargaining of traders. Nearby, the Blackstone wharfs serve as the heartbeat of the town, with ships of various flags continuously unloading their exotic wares. This accessibility positions the town as an indispensable juncture for merchants, effectively linking the Freelands to a larger economic ecosystem. Yet prosperity attracts danger; the town finds itself under the threat of the Red Wolf bandits. Lord Cedric Blackstone, the town's current overseer, has consequently commissioned the erection of a wall around the town. While the Sentinel North and Guardian South gates have been secured, the rest of the fortification remains under construction.

Socio-economic divisions are evident in the town's architecture. In privileged districts like the Merchant's Quarter and Nobles Row, cobblestone streets are as meticulously laid as the strategies of a chess grandmaster. Conversely, in less affluent neighborhoods like Grumblefoot Lane and Tanners' Alley, residents tread on well-packed earthen pathways. Elegant homes and businesses in opulent sectors flaunt rooftops of clay tiles, all uniformly dyed an inky black in tribute to the Blackstone legacy. The iconic crest of the Blackstone family—a crossed hammer and sword set against a mountainous backdrop—decorates banners throughout the town, serving as a visual reminder of the town's unwavering loyalty to the Blackstone lineage.

DORALLI MINING COMPANY

The Doralli Mining Company is a dominating force headquartered in the Grand Exchange of Haven, the capital of the Freelands. Led by the astute Mallory Doralli, the company specializes in extracting valuable resources from perilous locations across the continent. Known for its ruthless profit-driven ethos, Doralli often finds itself in ethically murky waters, leading to tensions with labor unions and watchdog groups.

Mallory's extensive network of spies and informants also permeates Haven's ruling Council of Seven. With enough gold pressed to flesh, most of the company's problems disappear amongst the bureaucratic red tape. Within the company, a Darwinian culture prevails; miners enduring hazardous conditions bond closely, while executives play a cutthroat game of power politics. To navigate these multifaceted challenges, Doralli frequently hires adventurers for both legitimate explorations and occasionally for more clandestine operations.

HILLSMERE BOWELS

Enshrouded in a lingering mist and filled with the incessant croaking of frogs and distant cries of mysterious creatures, the Hillsmere Bowels is a swamp like no other. A labyrinthine morass located in the Proudmore Woodlands, the swamp is filled with the remnants of ancient buildings and long-forgotten structures of past civilizations. Witherbog Keep is no easy destination; the party must traverse the swamp for approximately half a day to reach it. Overgrown foliage, suffocating humidity, and murky pools that seem to grab at one's feet make the journey perilous. The old washed-out roads that once led to the keep are nearly invisible now, requiring keen eyes and a sharp sense of direction to navigate.

The party must make a series of DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) checks to follow the barely discernible paths. It takes two successes or three failures to reach the keep. On a failure, the party stumbles across a random encounter. Roll a 1d6 and consult the Hillsmere Bowels Encounters table (page 4) or choose an encounter the characters have yet to face.

Once the characters have reached the keep, read aloud the following:

A crumbling keep rises out of the swamp's clinging mire, its decayed stone walls fighting the pull of lichen-covered moss and grasping vines. Encroaching marshland has started to claim the base of the walls, and the eroded parapets above cut through the sky like ragged teeth. Dominating the scene is a central tower, its roof long since collapsed, defiantly resisting the elements. A rickety drawbridge spans a murky moat, its timbers creaking as if to warn of unseen threats lurking beneath the water's surface. The air is thick with the musty scent of decay and stagnation.

A character inspecting the area who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a number of tracks in the mud along the trail. A DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check recognizes the tracks as a number of kobolds intermixed with human, halfling, and an unidentifiable Large Humanoid.

HILLSMERE BOWELS ENCOUNTERS

d6 Encounter

- 1 The party stumbles into a patch of quicksand. Each character must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained and begin to sink. A DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check is required to pull a companion out. On a failure, the assisting character falls into the quicksand and the sinking character begins to drown.
- 2 A group of $1d3+1$ **goblins** emerge from the foliage, seeing the party as threats to their territory. They attack unless appeased through a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check or scared away with a DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation) check. Offering food allows the check to be made with advantage.
- 3 The party encounters a lost merchant named Gerwald, who took a wrong turn and is desperate to escape the swamp. He offers a *potion of healing* in exchange for guidance out of the Hillsmere Bowels. Leading him out adds an additional Survival check needed for the party to reach the keep.
- 4 A pair of **crocodiles** lunge from the murky waters at the party. They attempt to drag characters into the water to drown them in the dark depths.
- 5 The characters stumble upon a circle of luminescent mushrooms. A DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals it's a fey circle. Entering it without offering a small tribute may result in a minor curse or summon a mischievous sprite that plays pranks on them while invisible.
- 6 The party reaches a rickety wooden bridge that is clearly damaged. Crossing it requires a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. Failure results in falling into a 10-foot-deep pool filled with leeches, taking falling damage and requiring a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or being infected with the Blood Rot Fever for $1d3$ days. An infected creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and cannot gain the benefits of a short or long rest for the duration as they are afflicted with body aches and an overwhelming fever. They can be cured with a remove disease spell or similar effect.



WITHERBOG KEEP

Witherbog Keep looms like a brooding sentinel amid the twisted mangroves and foggy marshes of the Hillsmere Bowels. Its stone walls, once proud and impenetrable, now bear the scars of a century's neglect—cracked, ivy-covered, and partially sunken into the swampy earth. A dilapidated drawbridge creaks over a murky moat, teeming with dark shapes that suggest lurking dangers. Jagged parapets, eroded by time and battle, jut into the sky like the broken teeth of some ancient leviathan. The central tower is mostly intact, while most of the second story towers have collapsed, exposing its interior to the elements. Moss and lichen cling tenaciously to the stones, and tarnished banners of long-forgotten mercenary bands flutter weakly in the swamp's stagnant air.

Currently, the keep is a sanctuary for a handful of the kobolds rescued by the warlord Krazzix Sharpclaw. They share the space uneasily with two ogres, Magrath and Jimbo, convinced to ally with the promise of human flesh. The pair have been preparing their kitchen for the feast awaiting them in their larder—the captured miners. Camouflaged kobold sentries keep vigilant watch from hidden nooks, and jury-rigged traps await trespassers at every turn. They know it is only a matter of time before someone comes along in search of the miners and to bring them back to their forced servitude.

GENERAL FEATURES

These general features are prominent throughout Witherbog Keep unless otherwise noted:

Ceilings, Floors, and Walls. Ceilings stand at a height of 10 feet throughout the keep's hallways and 15 to 20 feet in the chambers. Floors consist of uneven, worn flagstone tiles. The swamp has slowly filled sections and those areas are considered difficult terrain. Walls are made of cracked stone blocks covered in lichen and moss.

Doors. Most doors within the keep are made of rotten wood reinforced with iron bands. They have an AC of 15, 18 hit points, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and vulnerability to fire damage. Locked doors can be opened with a DC 15 Dexterity check using Thieves' Tools or forced open with a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

Lights. The kobolds have no need for additional light and only the temple (area 8) and ogre lair (area 7) are brightly lit. Depending on the time of day, the keep is either dark or dimly lit from the sunlight streaming through cracks in the ceiling. Room descriptions assume there is light or the party has a light source.

Climate. The keep is damp and musty, filled with the odor of mildew and swamp water. Characters who spend more than 1 hour in the keep must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned due to the spores in the air.

KOBOLD TRAPS

Scattered throughout Witherbog Keep are devious traps set by the kobold inhabitants, marked on the provided map with red X's. Each trap can be noticed by observant characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 14 or higher or who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check. The traps are rudimentary, each having a 50 percent chance of malfunctioning.

When a character triggers or fails to disarm (DC13) a trap, roll a 1d6 on the Random Kobold Trap table below to determine the type of trap triggered. After identifying the trap, roll a 1d10. On an even number, the character triggering the trap gains advantage on their saving throw to avoid its effects due to a malfunction.

For malfunctioning traps, you may choose to describe them as visibly faulty, giving a clue to observant characters, or simply narrate their failure when triggered.

RANDOM KOBOLD TRAP

d6 Trap

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Swinging Log. A log swings from above. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d4 bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. |
| 2 | Spiked Pit. A 5 foot wide and 10 foot deep pit is concealed by a cleverly concealed tarp. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or fall and take an additional 1d4 piercing damage from the spikes. |
| 3 | Slick Oil. Oil on the floor causes the target to slip. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone. |
| 4 | Snare. A noose loop tightens around an ankle and hoists the target 5 feet in the air. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained. |
| 5 | Tripwire Crossbow. A tripwire triggers a light crossbow and fires a bolt. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 1 piercing damage. |
| 6 | Drooping Net. A poorly stitched net falls from above covering a 10-foot-square area. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained. Those in the area are trapped under the net and restrained, and those that fail a DC 10 Strength saving throw are also knocked prone. A creature can use its action to make a DC 10 Strength check, freeing itself or another creature within its reach on a success. |

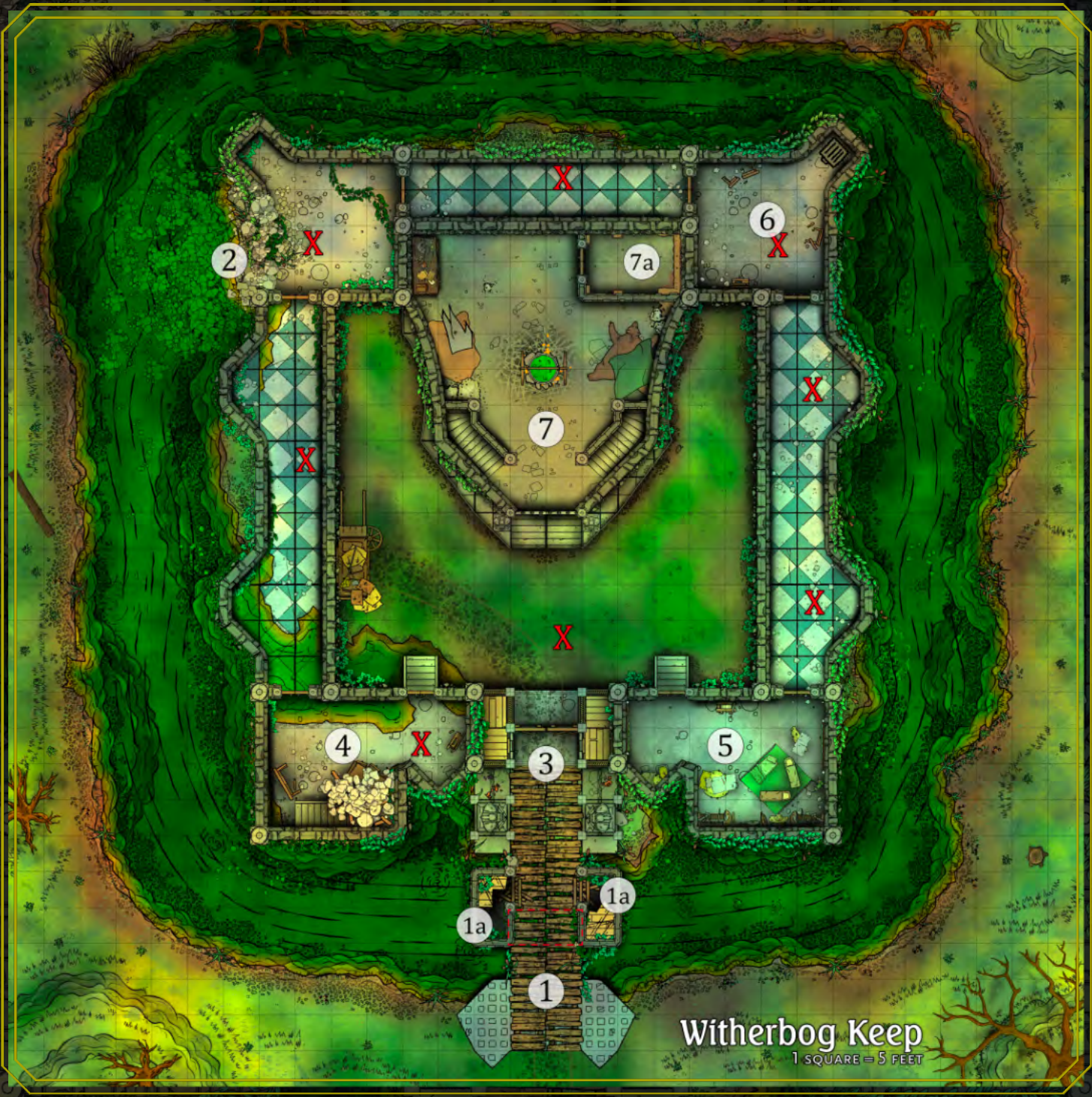
IMPORTANT NPCs

The following NPCs can be found in Witherbog Keep:

KRAZZIX SHARPCLAW

Krazzix Sharpclaw, a self-taught kobold warlord with emerald eyes and intricate scale patterns, carries the weight of his tribe's liberation on his shoulders. Gruff and calculating, he speaks in short, deliberate sentences, each word a carefully chosen tool aimed at achieving his unyielding goals. Notably adorned with battle scars and wearing armor made from the hide of a wyvern he personally defeated, Krazzix emanates an aura of rugged authority.

Krazzix tends to use short, pointed sentences, getting



Witherbog Keep

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

straight to the matter at hand. His tone often carries an undertone of urgency or weight, making even mundane conversations feel significant. When making decisions, especially in the heat of the moment, he relies heavily on his keen instincts and his understanding of tactics. He respects strength and courage but has little time for displays of ego or grandiosity.

Personality Trait. "When there's talk, I listen. When there's a fight, I lead. Silence is for the dead."

Bond. "Every scar I have is a lesson; every kobold I free is a victory. My purpose and my people are one and the same."

Flaw. "Trust? A fragile thing, easily broken, hardly mended. My walls are high and my circle small."

ROLEPLAYING KRAZZIX

When roleplaying Krazzix, keep in mind his quick intellect and natural leadership qualities. He's not the type to engage in pointless banter; he's direct and to the point but not without a sly sense of humor. Krazzix often sharpens his claws on a small whetstone he carries when he's deep in thought or planning. When he's suspicious or intrigued, his reptilian eyes narrow, and his tail flicks with interest.

MAGRATH AND JIMBO

Magrath and Jimbo were born in a warren of ogre tribes within the Motionless Mountains, far to the north of Witherbog Keep. While their tribe was annihilated by a band of wandering paladins when they were still young, the siblings managed to escape and wandered aimlessly, eventually settling in the decayed Witherbog Keep. They've lived there for several years, and the stronghold has become a part of their identity, with each sibling contributing to the upkeep in their own unique way. Magrath is the strategist and planner, with an unexpected flair for setting traps and fortifying defenses. Jimbo, on the other hand, serves as the sentinel, his heightened sense of smell proving invaluable in detecting threats.

Over the years, Magrath and Jimbo have developed a rather grim culinary taste, favoring human flesh for their feasts. Currently, they are in the throes of setting up their makeshift kitchen within Witherbog Keep, salivating at the prospect of turning the captured miners into their next lavish meal. They have already sharpened their cleavers and prepared their cauldrons, and the air is thick with the pungent aroma of strange herbs and spices. While they are generally indifferent to politics and squabbles, the offer of fresh "ingredients" from Krazzix has made them more than willing to accommodate their new kobold allies.

ROLEPLAYING THE OGRES

Roleplaying Magrath and Jimbo requires embracing their boisterous, brutish nature. Magrath is the domineering chef, obsessed with spices and "exotic" meat, while Jimbo is the quiet, lumbering enforcer. Both communicate in broken Common with a deep, gravelly

tone. While they may be ogres, the brothers share a deep bond and will fiercely defend each other. However, beneath their brotherly bond and semblance of civilization lies a brutal, carnivorous nature

THE FREED KOBOLDS

A ragtag group, their scales dulled and their eyes weary, these kobolds are armed with rusted weapons they pulled from the keeps armory. Despite their pitiable condition, there's a resolute spark in their eyes that suggests they've had enough of bowing and scraping. These kobolds fight to the death, fear of recapture fueling their desperate attacks. Their morale is high, and attempts to intimidate or reason with them have disadvantage, as they see the characters as oppressors wishing to capture them once more.

A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the kobolds' emaciated frames and the fresh and old whip marks on their backs, telling of the forced labor and abuse they've suffered. If the party captures a kobold, they can attempt to convey that they mean no harm with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check. The kobold might provide information about the atrocity committed at the mine and their subsequent rescue by Krazzix.



KRAZZIX SHARPCLAW

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the keyed locations on the provided map of Witherbog Keep.

1. BRIDGE

Gnarled and twisted wood planks make up the precarious bridge over the moat, groaning ominously with each step. Vines of sickly green hue and tufts of swamp moss drape over its sides like the fingers of some long-forgotten deity. Rot has eaten away at several planks, leaving perilous gaps. The air is thick with a putrid stench rising from the swamp below.

Cut Planks. The kobolds partially sawed through some of the planks near the center of the bridge. A creature who places 50 pounds or more on the affected area must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or fall 10 feet into the Moat (1b).

1A. SENTRY POSTS

Tucked into the husks of eroding 15-foot high stone towers that flank the rickety bridge, the sentry posts are little more than cramped alcoves suffused with the stench of wet fur and spoiled meat. Their jagged walls are punctuated by crudely widened gaps, resembling warped windows.

Two **kobolds** are stationed here (one per tower), each armed with a short crossbow and a quiver of 20 bolts. They gain half cover (+2 AC) from the makeshift windows when attacking or defending. If they notice intruders with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, they attack from hiding, gaining advantage on their first shots.

One of the kobolds has a small leather pouch. Inside are 10 gp, a *potion of poison*, and a crumpled note written in Draconic that reads, "We are coming. Be prepared. Kraxzix."

1B. MOAT

The surface of the moat ripples with foreboding activity beneath, and the buzz of insects forms an unsettling melody. Algae clusters float like malevolent islands, their rotting odor thick in the air. A **swarm of quippers** inhabit the moat and attack anything that enters the water.

Hidden Tunnel. The moss covered entrance to a small 15-foot long tunnel can be found on the eastern side of the keep with a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check. The tunnel is narrow enough for Medium creatures to squeeze through and Small creatures can easily swim its length. The grate on the other end leading into the Armory (area 5) is rusted shut and can be forced open with a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check.

2. BROKEN WALL

A gaping hole stretches wide amidst a mound of time-weathered bricks and shattered stones. Weeds of all kinds have overtaken the debris, their tendrils wrapping around the rubble like voracious snakes. Water from the surrounding swamp has crept in, creating a brackish puddle at the breach's base. It's an uninviting passage-way, shadowed and half-submerged, but it leads directly into the keep's courtyard.

A DC 15 Intelligence (History) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the ruins to be of Elven make, suggesting the keep is much older than it appears. Closer inspection with a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check may also reveal a few inscribed stones among the rubble; these are part of a much older, more intricate wall that existed before the current one. A DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies these inscriptions as old protection runes, now long inert but fascinating nonetheless.

3. FRONT GATE

The towering gate looms ahead, a piecemeal assemblage of rotting wood and rusty iron bars and nails. Various planks appear newer than others, showing the desperate attempts at reinforcement. Greenish moss has crept its way into the wood's grain, adding to the patina of decay.

Noisy Hinges. Attempting to silently open the gate requires a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. On a failure or attempting to open the gate without care produces a racket that can be heard up to 50 feet away. This will wake the sleeping kobolds in the Armory (5), who will arrive within 2 rounds to investigate.

4. BROKEN TOWER

The remnants of once-stately stone walls are piled in haphazard heaps around the base of this broken tower. **Unstable Rubble.** A successful DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check is required to climb the rubble to the second floor without falling. On a failure, the climber takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone at the base of the rubble.

TREASURE

A decaying chest lies half-buried in the rubble of the upper floor. Inside is a rotting pouch containing 50 gp, a tarnished silver chalice (25 gp), and a *scroll of spiritual weapon*. Additionally, molding crimson priestly garments lie folded at the bottom and a character proficient in Religion or who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Religion) check recognizes the burning rose symbol of Trasklyn, god of war. Tucked into the robes is a sheaf of vellum with the phrase "Trasklyn's hand rises high before striking his foes like a hammer onto an anvil." This is a hint to unlock the hidden treasure in the Vault (area 9).

5. ARMORY

In its prime, this room was a grand armory, a vault of martial promise filled with gleaming swords, shields, and armors. Now, it stands as a testament to decay and neglect. Moisture drips from the ceiling onto rusty weapon racks and moldy armor sets. The room smells of mildew and kobold musk. Crude mats and torn fabrics lay strewn about, serving as sleeping spots for the room's current occupants—three **kobolds** and two kobold **thugs**. Unless alerted by the sound of the opening front gate (see area 3), the group is enjoying a moment of rest and lying asleep. Stealthy characters who succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check can take the kobolds by surprise.

TREASURE

A hidden compartment behind one of the rusty weapon racks can be discovered with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Behind the loose stone is a +1 *shortsword* with intricate elvish inscriptions.

6. CRUMBLING BARRACKS

Once a bustling hive of activity for soldiers and mercenaries, the barracks is now a crumbling shell of its former glory. Rocks and mold have overtaken what was once polished wood and iron, and the air is thick with the pungent smell of dampness and decay. Piles of rotted, collapsed furniture lay strewn across the uneven floor.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check recognizes the faded banners on the wall as the crest of the Crimson Boars, a mercenary warband that fought in the Great War hundreds of years ago. They fought on the side of the Holy Ignis Empire, but were defeated in the famous battle of the Black Hills, a conflict that ended in the Undead corruption that plagues that region of the Freelands.

Escape Hatch. A rusted grate in one corner of the room connects to a 15-foot long tunnel that leads into the murky waters of the Moat (area 1b). It can be forced opened with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

WHISPERS FROM THE LARDER

If the miners in area 7a have not been freed, one of them is actively chipping away at the mortar at the connecting wall. He whispers frantically at the party if he hears them approach. Read aloud the following:

A muffled whisper comes from a small hole in the northern wall. "Pssst! Over here! Are you from the company? Quick, we haven't much time!"

The miner's name is Bartleby (see "The Injured Miner" adventure hook on page 2) and he is eager to share crucial information if he senses that the party can be trusted. He shares the following information:

- "A kobold named Krazzix led the attack on our mine. He's no ordinary kobold; he's got some sort of dark magic. Keeps talking about a 'grand plan'."
- "There are five more of us, shackled and starved in here. There's two ogres on the other side and they're gonna eat us!"
- "I think one o' the ogres is smarter than usual, but the other is dumb as they come. Got a powerful sniffer, though."

7. OGRE LAIR

Formerly the opulent hall of Witherbog Keep, this chamber now serves as the loathsome abode of the ogre brothers Magrath and Jimbo. Low-hanging lanterns crafted from crude metal and animal hides illuminate the wretched tableau. Piles of bones—some still sporting shreds of flesh—lay scattered about, alongside heaps of decaying food scraps and rudimentary cooking implements. The stone floor is slick with an indescribable muck, while the once-finely hewn walls are splotched with dark, ominous stains.

Having made the ruinous keep their home, they have a primitive yet surprisingly well-set-up kitchen area where they plan to prepare the captured miners for a gruesome feast. Read aloud the following when the party enters this area:

As you enter the cavernous chamber, the smell hits you first—pungent herbs mixed with the unmistakable odor of rotting flesh. Crudely fashioned lanterns swing from the ceiling, casting grotesque shadows upon heaps of bones and decaying food. A pair of towering ogres loom near a ramshackle table holding an assortment of cleavers and spices. While one sharpens a carving knife, the other narrows his eyes, poring over an array of spices, his fingers dancing hesitantly above each before making a selection. He then turns his gaze toward you and rumbles in a broken, gravelly voice, "Mmm, you smell different. Not swamp. Not kobold. You food or you trade?"

The two **ogres** can be swayed by an offer of exotic meats or spices to enhance their culinary endeavors. A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Persuasion) check, coupled with a tangible offering (such as Wyvern meat or rare mountain herbs worth at least 50 gold), may convince them to release the miners. They don't much care for the kobolds and only suffer their presence because of the deal they made. If the characters manage to parlay with them, the brothers agree to let them upstairs to confront Krazzix in the Temple (area 8).

Showing signs of hostility or failing to convince them to accept the offering of food results in the ogres turning hostile as they see the party as fresh meat for their stew pot.

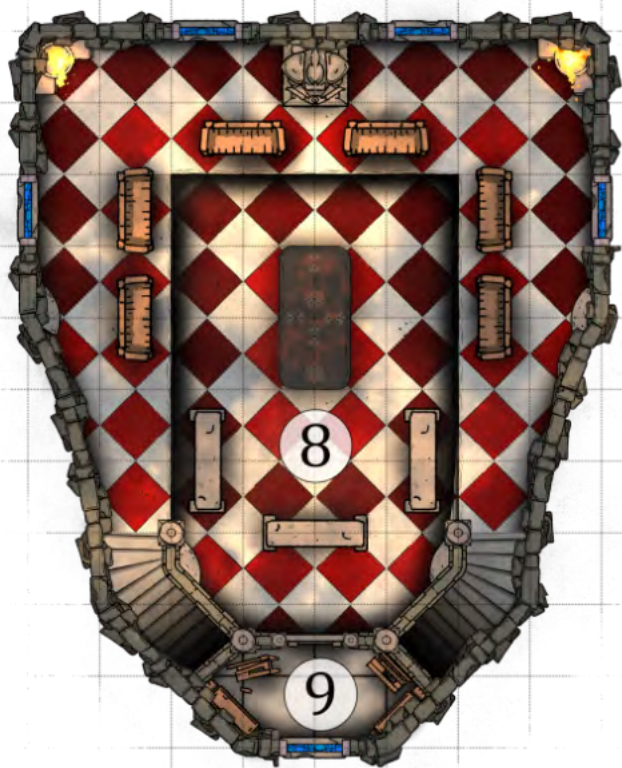
TREASURE

A large iron key that unlocks the door to the Larder (area 7a) can be found in a pouch on Magrath's belt, along with an assortment of bones from various animals. A character who searches through the piles of trash and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check finds an ornate, curved dagger with a ruby pommel, worth 100 gp. Additionally, a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Nature) check identifies some of the herbs as rare, medicinal flora that can be used to craft a Healer's Kit with 5 uses.

7A. LARDER

The door is locked (see General Features) and Magrath has the iron key. Originally a storeroom for holding provisions, this room has been twisted into a holding cell, trapping the six captured miners, one of whom is Bartleby (refer to "The Injured Miner" adventure hook on page 2).

The miners are grateful to be rescued and give what little knowledge they know about being attacked at the mines. If asked about the kobolds being forced to work in the mines, the group are adamant they didn't know anything about that. A DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check recognizes their surprise and shock as sincere. Additionally, they inform the party that the foreman, Eamon Cragjaw, was taken by the kobold leader for special punishment.



8. TEMPLE

Ornate engravings of Trasklyn's martial visage adorn the walls of this temple, their ancient dignity tarnished by the unspeakable rites now performed here. In the center of the room is an engraved stone altar, encrusted with dark, coagulated fluids and holding a manacled human male, Eamon Cragjaw (lawful evil, human **guard**, he doesn't have any equipment and has 1 hit point remaining). His flesh is marred by dozens of bleeding cuts, and his shallow breaths come in sync with each drop of blood that falls onto the darkened stone of the altar, adding to the sanguine pools that have formed in its grooves. A set of cruel-looking ritual knives lay on a side table near the altar, their blades stained a sinister shade of red.

Once the party enters this area, read aloud :

Rich engravings of a fierce war deity brandish the walls of this ruined temple. Dominating the center is an ominous stone altar, slick with dark, half-coagulated fluids. Chained atop it, a gaunt human male gasps with each droplet of blood that spills onto the stone, joining a gruesome pool collecting in the altar's channels. A side table nearby holds an array of vicious ritual blades, all stained a dark and unsettling red.

Behind the altar, a sturdy kobold with a countenance of grim authority stands, flanked by two fellow kobolds. His eyes lock onto yours, emanating a cold, calculating scrutiny. "Explain yourselves," he demands, his voice cutting through the tense air like a knife. "Why have you invaded our sanctuary and attacked my people?"

Krazzix Sharpclaw (lawful neutral, **kobold warlord**, see Appendix for statistics) stands behind the altar with two kobold **thugs** flanking him. If the party does not instantly attack, he coldly speaks with them to determine the purpose of their assault on the keep. If they were unaware of the truth behind the kobolds forced labor in the mine, he is quick to point out this fact, placing the blame on the foreman on the altar. He shares the following information willingly:

- The kobolds were taken from various tribes and coerced into servitude through twisted contracts by the Doralli Mining Company. The promise of future freedom was the sugar-coated pill that made this enslavement seem palatable.
- Most of the rescued kobolds have already returned to their native tribes. The few who remained are here to stave off would-be avengers, such as yourselves.
- The foreman—Eamon Cragjaw, the near-death human on the altar—acted as the company's nefarious agent, fully aware of these contracts and even instrumental in keeping the kobolds hidden from other miners.

Dark Rituals. Spellcasters feel a mild headache in this area due to the defiled altar. Creatures in this room suffer disadvantage on saving throws made to maintain concentration.

DEVELOPMENTS

If the characters succeed on a DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check, they can convince the warlord to give them the gems (see area 9) to return to the Doralli Mining Company. However, Kraxzix absolutely refuses to release the foreman into their custody. He allows the party to take the gems and leave in peace as long as they agree to leave the human with them for their retribution. Otherwise, Kraxzix and his enforcers fight to the death in defense of their ideals. Kraxzix has a *wand of web* with 3 charges remaining.

If rescued, Eamon is thankful towards the party but his loyalty to the Doralli Mining Company is strong enough that he refuses to comment on anything he knows regarding the kobolds. He refers the characters to speak with the company representative, Quintus, if they insist on answers.

TREASURE

A hidden compartment in the altar can be found with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Inside is a *potion of heroism* and 50 gp. Additionally, Kraxzix's *wand of web* can be recovered from him along with a list of crossed off names of Doralli Mining Company employees with Eamon Cragjaw at the bottom.

9. VAULT

The vault is a repository of decay, filled with crumbling tomes and corroded trinkets. A pungent mix of old parchment and rust fills the air. Amidst the disarray, a satchel of glimmering emeralds, rubies, and sapphires worth a total of 1,000 gp takes pride of place on a vacant shelf. The crest of the Doralli Mining Company is embossed on the leather flap.

However, the room's centerpiece is an intricate embossing of the war god Trasklyn on the far wall. The deity holds a finely crafted hammer aloft, and the character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score notices its arm is jointed at the elbow and wrist, suggesting a functional mechanism. Surrounding the embossing are faded but decipherable inscriptions that read, "Heaven's call, Earth's fury, the hammer's might finds its true path."

VAULT PUZZLE

The embossing conceals a secret compartment, and the inscriptions hint at its activation. The character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) sees that the joints in the arm show signs of prior movement, further hinting that the arm can be manipulated.

- The inscriptions talk of a heavenly call followed by earthly fury, implying the hammer must first be raised and then swung down.

- A successful DC 15 Intelligence (History or Religion) check recalls the lore about Trasklyn's renowned battle stance called "The Heaven-Earth Strike."

Solution. To unlock the secret compartment, the arm must be rotated upward at the elbow and then downward at the wrist, mimicking a hammer swing. When the arm is correctly positioned, a hidden compartment clicks open, revealing its secret contents. Inside is an *iron flask of rejuvenation*. This ornate iron flask has a stopper made of a blood-red gemstone. Drinking from the flask restores 2d4+2 hit points and cures one condition affecting the drinker (poison, blinded, deafened). It contains 3 uses, that can be replenished by filling the flask with a *potion of healing*.

Additionally, the compartment holds a map etched onto a piece of ancient vellum that appears to lead to the Cave of Echoing Roars, rumored to contain an artifact known as *The Hammer of Heavenly Thunder*. Accompanying the map is a letter written in religious code. Cracking the code with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation or Religion) check reveals hints about the artifact and the terrible Celestial guardian that protects it, setting the stage for a new adventure.

CONCLUSION

The repercussions of the characters' actions reverberate far beyond the grim walls of Witherbog Keep. With the demise or capitulation of Kraxzix Sharpclaw and the rescue of the miners, the ethical lines remain blurred, opening the door for nuanced conversations about morality and justice in the days to come. The town of Blackstone Crossing faces an ethical dilemma when news spreads that the Doralli Mining Company used captured kobolds for forced labor. The company's reputation is in tatters, and the community is forced to question the moral cost of their economic prosperity.

ADVENTURE HOOK RESOLUTION

If the characters were introduced to this adventure through one of the provided adventure hooks, use the following resolutions to end the adventure:

THE INJURED MINER

Rescuing Bartleby and the other captive miners cements the characters as heroes in the eyes of the townspeople. Jed, the wounded miner who first alerted them, is especially grateful, and his tale of their daring deeds becomes a regular story shared at the Creaking Tankard. Bartleby takes on a more active role in advocating for the rights and safety of miners, bringing attention to the plight of indentured kobolds in the process.

KOBOLD RAIDS

The resolution of the kobold threat brings a wave of relief to the community. Old prospector Hobb can hardly contain his enthusiasm as he realizes the gem mine can

now operate without fear of further attacks. However, the kobold raids, initially dismissed as simple barbarity, now cast a spotlight on the unscrupulous activities of the Doralli Mining Company. The people of Blackstone Crossing are no longer oblivious to the dangers that come with avarice.

MERCENARIES FOR HIRE

Quintus, the Doralli representative, finds himself in a difficult situation. While the miners are rescued, the revelation about the kobold slaves tarnishes the Doralli Mining Company's reputation irrevocably. The characters must decide whether to take the 500 gp and 50 gp bonus per miner rescued from the morally bankrupt enterprise, or sever ties and make a principled stand.

APPENDIX

KOBOLD WARLORD

In the depths of caverns or ruins of ancient strongholds, kobold warlords rise above their meek kin as cunning tacticians and capable fighters. A kobold warlord is not merely a brawler; they are a leader and a thinker, sometimes a visionary. Typically emerging from a crucible of strife or a grand purpose, these individuals exemplify the pinnacle of kobold martial achievement. Kobold warlords are proficient with a variety of weapons and possess the intelligence to lead their packs with strategic expertise. They usually rise to power through ruthless cunning, audacious courage, or sheer tactical brilliance. Not all kobold warlords are evil; many fight to protect their clans and achieve a level of greatness rare for their often-underestimated race.

Battlefield Commanders. A kobold warlord can command its troops with uncanny effectiveness, sometimes utilizing unique commands or abilities that allow their pack to function as a cohesive unit during a fight. This has been known to turn the tide of battle on more than one occasion.

KOBOLD WARLORD

Medium Humanoid (kobold), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (splint armor)

Hit Points 52 (12d6 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills Stealth +3, Persuasion +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +2

Pack Tactics. The kobold has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the kobold's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Warlord's Maneuvers. The warlord has a pool of 4 superiority dice, which are d6s. A superiority die is expended when the warlord uses a maneuver. The warlord regains all expended superiority dice when it finishes a short or long rest. The warlord knows the following maneuvers:

Commanding Strike. When the warlord hits a creature with a weapon attack, it can expend one superiority die to allow an ally within 30 feet to make a single attack as a reaction, adding the superiority die to the damage roll.

Distracting Strike. When the warlord hits a creature with a weapon attack, it can expend one superiority die to distract the target. The next attack roll against the target by an attacker other than the warlord has advantage. The superiority die is added to the damage roll.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. The warlord makes two Shortsword attacks or one Shortsword attack and one Hand Crossbow attack.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Rallying Cry (Recharge 5-6). The warlord emits a war cry that invigorates its allies. All allies within 30 feet of the warlord gain temporary hit points equal to 1d6 + the warlord's Charisma modifier (total 1d6 + 3).

REACTIONS

Redirect Attack. When a creature targets the warlord with an attack, the warlord can choose an ally within 5 feet and within range of the attack. The attacker then rerolls the attack against the ally. To do so, the warlord must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.



CREDITS

Author: TJ Phoenix

Production & Design: THE DM TOOL CHEST

Cover Illustration: Midjourney

Cartography: TJ Phoenix, DungeonDraft using assets from Skront's Stuff, The MAD Cartographer

Interior Illustrations: Midjourney

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